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FM AMEMBASSY ASUNCION
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7813
INFO MERCOSUR COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
USSOCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
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DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC PRIORITY
FBI WASHDC PRIORITY

UNCLAS ASUNCION 000284

SENSITIVE

FOR DS/ITA, DS/IP, DS/ATA, S/CT AND WHA/BSC

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: ASEC PTER PA

SUBJECT: FAKE BOMB CAUSES DOWNTOWN CONFUSION

REF: ASUNCION 261

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: At approximately 8:30 am on May 5, 2009, the Paraguayan police located what appeared to be an improvised explosive device (IED) in downtown Asuncion. After securing the area, the Government of Paraguay (GOP) requested U.S. Government assistance. RSO, FBI and SOCFWD elements responded to the scene and provided technical assistance. At 11:30 am, the device was disabled via use of a DS/ATA-provided water cannon. Subsequent examination by the RSO and SOCFWD experts revealed that the bomb was a fake - expertly made to look real. END SUMMARY

¶2. (SBU) DETAILS: At approximately 8:30 am on May 5, 2009, police located what appeared to be an IED on the ledge of a business owned by Gustavo SABA - a well-known businessman with ties to Syria and Russia. The area was evacuated and a perimeter of 100 meters set. At 9:00 am the Vice Minister of Interior called the RSO to ask for assistance. (NOTE: Three minutes before the Vice Minister called, the news media reported the GOP had asked the U.S. Embassy for assistance. END NOTE). The Vice Minister specifically asked whether the Embassy possessed equipment to move the bomb from one location to another. RSO spoke with SOCFWD and determined that we did not possess the correct equipment.

¶3. (SBU) The Vice Minister then asked the RSO to join him, the Minister of Interior and the Chief of Police at the scene. After speaking with Ambassador and DCM, RSO requested that explosives experts from SOCFWD and the FBI accompany him to the scene.

¶4. (SBU) After analyzing photographs taken of the device by Paraguayan special operations police (FOPE), the decision was made to detonate the device using a water cannon and blasting cap. The FOPE used the Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) suit and water cannon provided by DS/ATA last year in order to detonate the device. At 11:30 am, after evacuating nearby buildings, the device was harmlessly deactivated.

¶5. (SBU) While there were reports of one or more additional devices, none were found.

¶6. (SBU) The Minister of Interior asked for U.S. assistance analyzing the apparent bomb and at 3:00 pm, RSO, FBI and SOCFWD inspected the remains of the device. Using the GE Itemiser and analyzing the remnants, the device appeared to contain no explosives. The device was made of industrial batteries held together by wire sautered onto the battery receptors. RSO informed the Chief of Police of the finding. The police displayed an interest in keeping this information temporarily quiet in hopes that an organization would claim responsibility.

¶7. (SBU) The Minister of Interior and his team also requested U.S. assistance obtaining more sophisticated EOD equipment to include an EOD robot. The GOP is prepared to pay for the equipment, but would like assistance in obtaining it immediately.

¶8. (SBU) COMMENT: Although there have been no claims of responsibility for today - or last week's (reftel) - incident, many theories abound. The most prevalent theory is that the Paraguayan People's Army (EPP) is behind the April 29 bombing and today's fake bomb. Others believe that opposition elements led by former coup-plotter General Oviedo seek to diminish confidence in Lugo's administration. Most improbably, others believe Lugo himself is behind the chaos in order to distract from his own scandals and consolidate power. While the investigation goes on, the U.S. Embassy will continue to offer assistance when asked.

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